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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Book?

Novels illustrate the connections between individuals and questions of humanity. Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives, while painting those conflicts in the larger picture of human struggle. Readers forge bonds with the story as the writer's voice, style, and sense of poetry inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities for learning, imagining, and reflecting, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changing lives, challenging assumptions, and breaking new ground.



Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Joy Luck Club*? How is it different?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. How does Tan's novel provide a voice of a generation? How does the structure of the narrative, including eight voices with multiple stories, reflect an innovative approach to the novel? How might this lead the way for the next generation?

Divide students into groups and have each one choose the single most important theme of the novel. Have a spokesperson from each group explain the group's decision. Write these themes on the board. Do all the groups agree?



Writing Exercise

Have students re-read the vignettes that introduce each of the four books. Write two pages explaining how these vignettes inform the structure of the novel. Do they assist in guiding the daughters (and us) "how to lose your innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever?"



Homework

Students should work on their essays. See "Essay Topics" in the next section. For additional questions, see the Reader's Guide "Discussion Questions." Turn in outlines and/or rough drafts for the next class.